

COMMENTARY

If Change Is Inevitable in Venezuela, Will Cuba and Nicaragua Soon Follow?



Teo Babun

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For millions of Venezuelans, Cubans, and Nicaraguans living in South Florida, the question is no longer whether change will come to their homelands, but when — and at what cost. As U.S. pressure intensifies on Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro, the potential collapse of one regime could reshape the future of all three.

The U.S. military buildup in the Caribbean has exposed Venezuela's role in the drug trade contributing to 100,000 American deaths annually since 2021. But at minimum, Cuba is an enabler, providing thousands of intelligence, military, and other security "advisors" to Venezuela and despot Daniel Ortega's government in Nicaragua. Cuba also exports its doctors to Venezuela and other countries, selling their forced services (aka "modern day slavery") for billions of dollars in foreign exchange. As brought to light in recent days with the U.S. seizure of a sanctioned tanker on its way to Cuba, Venezuela also sends cheap oil to its two allies to keep those regimes in power.

The three regimes, under a banner of faux socialism, are actually a criminal alliance of entitled groups of civilian and military elite profiting from greed. Researcher Juan Antonio Blanco calls the criminal element in Cuba a "modern day mafia" holding billions of dollars in secret accounts during a time when Cuba blames the U.S.

embargo on a financing shortfall for annual food imports. Human rights atrocities and collapsed living conditions have systematically erased any lingering public support for Fidel Castro's Marxist-Leninist Cuban policies, the "21st century" Venezuela socialism of Hugo Chavez, and Ortega's Sandinista revolution. Not surprisingly, along with Haiti, the three countries have the highest rates of extreme poverty in the hemisphere.

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According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the faux socialist "triad" of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela share a common tactical playbook: harassment of religious communities, legal obstruction, favoritism toward certain religious groups, and closure of civic space. USCIRF says they are among "the most flagrant violators of religious freedom worldwide" and international observers say the violations amount to "crimes against humanity." The regimes' motive for these abuses? Faith leaders and churches, who defend human rights and democracy, are far more respected than these corrupt government leaders – as such, the regimes feel compelled to silence their voices.

These regimes continue to thumb their noses at religious rights advocates. On December 10, Venezuela detained Cardinal Baltazar Porras, a staunch regime critic, and banned him from leaving the country. The next day, in Cuba, a Mexican priest, Father José Ramírez, who led feeding programs for senior citizens, was expelled from the country after he rang church bells in solidarity with community members protesting intolerable living conditions. In Nicaragua, the Ortega government crushes freedom of religion, imprisoning and deporting Catholic and evangelical leaders, confiscating their schools and other property, and shutting down over 2,000 faith-based organizations.

The Venezuela regime's days may be numbered, and with it may go Cuba's junta as it runs out of regional supporters. As well, last month the U.S. Trade Office surveyed stakeholders on a proposal to eject Nicaragua from the U.S. trade agreement with Central America, CAFTA-DR, possibly in early 2026. A forced exit could be a deathblow to Daniel Ortega's tenuous relationship with Nicaragua's business community. In the unlikely scenario that Maduro survives the next few

months, Venezuela should be added to the U.S. Department of State' list of [Countries of Particular Concern](#) for its "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom," joining Cuba and Nicaragua on the list since 2022.

My organization, Outreach Aid to the Americas, has defended religious freedom and provided for the humanitarian needs of persecuted peoples in the region, working through our extensive faith community networks, for more than 30 years. While we promote peacebuilding and non-violent solutions, we recognize the tragedy of totalitarian rule in these three countries and the regimes' firm lock on power. As such, we fully stand by tougher measures to end these criminal operations and restore democracy and essential human rights for the people of Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

Teo A. Babun is the president and CEO of Outreach Aid to the Americas (OAA), a nonprofit religious organization dedicated to serving vulnerable communities in the Americas through humanitarian aid, development, and the defense of human rights. He is the author of several books, including "Faith and Freedom in Latin America."

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